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STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM  
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

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E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)  
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

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SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:  
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Assassination of Hamas Leader Ahmed Yassin

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Key stories in the media:  
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All media continued to lead with the aftermath of Hamas leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin's assassination. The media reported that IDF Chief of Staff Moshe Ya'alon hinted Tuesday that PA Chairman Yasser Arafat and Hizbullah Secretary-General Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah are next in

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line.

Leading media quoted President Bush as saying Tuesday that Israel has the right to defend itself from terror, but that it should keep the consequences of its actions in mind. Jerusalem Post quoted him as saying: "I worry about terrorist groups targeting America. There are still serious threats because of what we stand for. There are still people who want to harm our country. And so whether it be a Hamas threat or an Al-Qaida threat, we take them very seriously." Ha'aretz and Israel Radio note that Tuesday senior White House officials, including National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, altered their responses to the assassination. Speaking on Israel Radio from Washington, FM Silvan Shalom minimized the significance of that change. Leading media reported that U.S. State Department issued a travel warning for the region.

All media reported that Tuesday Abdel Aziz Rantisi became the new "general commander" of Hamas, replacing Yassin. Khaled Mashal, who approved Rantisi's leadership, remains the head of the movement's political bureau. Several media reported on possible personality conflicts inside the Hamas leadership.

IDF operations in the Gaza Strip: The media reported that the IDF is continuing its incursion in the northern strip area of Beit Hanoun to prevent further Qassam rocket launchings, and that it is operating on the outskirts of Khan Yunis. The media also reported that the IDF fired at boats off the Gaza Strip coast. Israel Radio reported that last night the IDF killed two terrorists who tried to infiltrate the settlement of Morag.

All media reported that late Tuesday night IAF warships struck at a terrorist squad in south Lebanon close to the central portion of the border, after it was spotted preparing launchers for firing Katyusha rockets into Israel the Lebanese border. The members of the squad, who were killed, apparently were Palestinian members of Hizbullah.

Israel Radio reported that, due to U.S. opposition, Algeria pulled a resolution draft condemning the killing of Yassin, which it had presented to the UN Security Council. The radio quoted U.S. Ambassador to the UN John Negroponte as saying that the draft ignores terrorist attacks by Hamas. PM Sharon's disengagement plan: Israel Radio reported that the current round of discussions between NSA Rice and Sharon's envoys Dov Weisglass and Giora Eiland, which started Tuesday, will continue today. Former Mossad Director Ephraim Halevy said on Israel TV last night that Israel is conducting indirect negotiations on Sharon's disengagement with the Palestinians through the U.S.

All media reported on the 3,000-strong protest march

held in Nazareth Tuesday to mourn Yassin. Leading media printed pictures and aired footage from the event, saying: "This isn't Gaza, but Nazareth." Yediot reported that the public address system at the demonstration blared a song of praise for Yassin: "Leader of freedom, our sunlight, you are the candle that lights our lost way." All media reported on clashes in Jerusalem between the police and demonstrators who blocked the entrance to the Hebrew University's main campus when Sharon was addressing immigrant students there.

Ha'aretz reported that the Finance Ministry told a Knesset subcommittee Tuesday that the cost of constructing 300 km of the security fence in 2004 is estimated at 1.5 billion shekels (approx. USD 333 million) -- 200 million shekels (approx. USD 44 million) more than the initial forecast.

Ha'aretz disclosed details of facts uncovered in an IDF military court ruling: Kayes Obeid, the Israeli Arab and Hezbollah agent who had collaborated temporarily with Elchanan Tenenbaum and helped Hizbullah abduct him plotted to abduct other Israelis. Israel Radio and IDF Radio reported that two Israeli Arabs from northern Israel have been arrested for having allegedly conspired to murder soldiers and steal their weapons during the month of February.

Yediot reported that branches of the defense establishment have decided to modify landing routes at Ben Gurion Airport, so that airplanes do not fly too close to the West Bank. The newspaper also reported that aircraft will not be allowed to fly over the Israeli Arab city of Umm el Fahm.

Leading media reported that Tuesday the High Court of Justice upheld an IDF ban on allowing Israeli journalists to enter the Gaza Strip following the assassination of Yassin.

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Assassination of Hamas Leader Ahmed Yassin:  
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Summary:  
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Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "The approach that chooses to deal with Palestinian terror by assassinating individual leaders, instead of a determined effort to reach an agreement with the PA on renewing dialogue, is wrongheaded."

Veteran op-ed writer Yaron London opined in the editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "We [Israelis] were not given any solid or clear explanation, and we do not know how the assassination fits in with the vision of the political arrangement with the Palestinians."

Liberal contributor Dr. Gadi Taub wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv: "The more we [Israel] identify Hamas with Al Qaida, the more points Al Qaida gains as an Arab liberation movement, a freedom fighting organization against the Zionist-American alliance."

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "The condemnation by Arab leaders of Israel's pinpoint targeting of Hamas godfather Ahmed Yassin sounds like an awfully bad joke, which almost beggars [sic] the retort of 'look who's talking.'"

Conservative columnist Avraham Tirosh wrote in Maariv: "In a situation in which you cannot eradicate the causes of terror, you should eradicate its leaders, whose goal is to eradicate you."

Far-left, Arabic-language Al-Ittihad editorialized: "The international community has the duty to pressure Sharon's government to stop the bloodshed and to save the Palestinian people from this colonial occupation."

Block Quotes:  
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I. "Deterrence and Horror"

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (March 24): "Official [Israeli] spokesmen confirm that in the short run the assassination [of Sheikh Ahmed Yassin] will indeed make Israelis and Jews worldwide more vulnerable, but promise that in the short run everyone will see that the killing was worthwhile. That assumption rests on very shaky ground.... Last week's cabinet decision to kill off the Hamas leadership broke

the rules of the game, and could move the armed conflict to areas never seen before.... The approach that chooses to deal with Palestinian terror by assassinating individual leaders, instead of a determined effort to reach an agreement with the PA on renewing dialogue, is wrongheaded.... The cabinet decision could yet go down a serious negative change of direction in the history of the conflict."

## II. "Still, Why Was Yassin Assassinated?"

Veteran op-ed writer Yaron London opined in the editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (March 24): "And perhaps there is a 'critical mass' of assassination victims, which will cause a turnabout? Certainly. When we kill all the Palestinians, big and small, there will be no one left to kill us. Until then, we can presume that every assassination increases the pool of terrorists and fuels the murderous rhetoric. It is true that among the educated, largely secular Palestinian elite, voices can be heard that show a more sober view, but this group, upon which the government has pinned its hopes, the group that is the basis for the vision of the Geneva plan's architects, and with whom Jewish peace activists talk, has zero influence on the prevalent trend.... The dead Yassin is stronger than the live Yassin, and his image as the most senior of Muslim saints is already inflaming the imagination of the masses and narrowing the freedom of action enjoyed by the moderate Palestinian leaders. If the government had explained to Israelis sincerely what its considerations were before it decided on the strike -- what it feared, what it hoped for and what tipped the scales -- we would be able to agree or disagree with it, but either way we would feel like citizens who are partners to deciding their fate. But we were not given any solid or clear explanation, and we do not know how the assassination fits in with the vision of the political arrangement with the Palestinians, how it will benefit our security and what dangers it involves. In its silence and enigmatic talk, the government humiliates its citizens and puts them into a fatalistic mood, which weakens their staying power."

## III. "We've Gotten the U.S. in Trouble"

Liberal contributor Dr. Gadi Taub wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv (March 24): "One needs to bear in mind that America not only has defined new parameters for evil, but also has parameters for good. Evil changes -- once upon a time it was communism, now it is terrorism -- but good has remained stable: democracy, self-determination and equality. Things become most uncomfortable for the Americans when the definitions of evil clash with the definitions of good.... In the long run, the last thing they want is for their war on terror to be cast as the oppression of national liberation movements. They made every effort to paint their war on Saddam Hussein as a war of liberation that was being fought in the name of the Iraqis: they do not oppress nations in the context of their war on terror, they liberate them. That is the message. Just like in the Cold War. Israel's war on Palestinian terror creates a problem here. It creates a tactical problem since the moderate Arab regimes cannot support American intervention in the Middle East if it is perceived as part of the American support for the oppression of the Palestinians. And it creates a more profound strategic problem since it stains Bush's war on terror with colors of oppression instead of colors of liberation. It helps bin Laden turn himself into a liberation fighter. The more we identify Hamas with Al Qaida, the more points Al Qaida gains as an Arab liberation movement, a freedom fighting organization against the Zionist-American alliance.... It is a worldwide American interest not to give terrorists an entry card into the union of national liberation organizations. And we would do well, very well, to steer clear of colliding with that interest."

## IV. "Look Who's Talking"

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (March 24): "The condemnation by Arab leaders of Israel's pinpoint targeting of Hamas godfather Ahmed Yassin sounds like an awfully bad joke, which almost beggars [sic] the retort of 'look who's talking.' Israel's critics in the Arab world are the very last who should decry action against fundamentalist Islamic terrorism. They know they fear it every bit as much as Israel, if not more.... The latest to persecute the [Muslim] Brotherhood is Egyptian President Hosni

Mubarak, who reacted to Yassin's demise by canceling a visit of Egyptian legislators to Israel to mark the 25th anniversary of the peace treaty between the countries. He lashed out at Israel for having committed 'a savage act.' Yet his repression of the still-banned Brotherhood is ongoing.... None of this is to suggest that Israel should measure itself by the standards of the Arab world. This record should give pause, however, to Western governments that shape their own statements to accommodate official Arab anger at Israel's minimalist act of self-defense. The Arab world has no standing to lecture Israel on human rights, the rule of law, or international legitimacy. Western governments that ignore this wide disparity, and which have long histories of taking similar prudent, measured, and reluctant actions against terrorism themselves, should spare us their criticism as well."

#### V. "A Welcome Assassination"

Conservative columnist Avraham Tirosh wrote in Maariv (March 24): "Shimon Peres said on Monday that the most effective solution to terror is to eradicate the causes of terror, and not its leaders. Theoretically, he is right. In practice, in the case of Hamas -- he isn't. Because the only thing that sparks Hamas terrorism is the very existence of Israel in the region, and not the occupation of Judea, Samaria and Gaza. 'Eradicating the causes of terror' in this case means, therefore, eradicating the State of Israel. That, in succinct form, was the ideology of the 'spiritual leader,' Sheikh Ahmed Yassin. That, needless to say, is something that even Shimon Peres would not agree to. Therefore, in a situation in which you cannot eradicate the causes of terror, you should eradicate its leaders, whose goal is to eradicate you. Prevent them from seizing control of the Palestinian territories so that you are left with a chance of engaging in dialogue and achieving an agreement. It is people, like me, who support disengagement from Gaza and most of the territories in Judea and Samaria, and dialogue with the Palestinian Authority, who ought to support the elimination of murderous terrorists of Yassin's kind, who commit criminal acts to prevent any chance of that happening."

#### VI. "Save the Palestinian People from Massacres and Occupation"

Far-left, Arabic-language Al-Ittihad editorialized (March 23): "The Israeli occupation forces have committed an organized terror operation ... missiles were shot from an American Apache warship to assassinate Hamas's leader, Sheikh Ahmad Yassin.... This crazy Sharonic escalation will trigger the conflict with more fire and violence.... A historic responsibility demands serious initiative of the Arab-Jewish peace movements to forge unity to restrain the occupation government crimes.... The international community has the duty to pressure Sharon's government to stop the bloodshed and to save the Palestinian people from this colonial occupation."

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